

The All-Elusive Anchor Man



Qusay Munir was rock solid at the 2007 Asian Cup

In 2007, Iraq stunned Asia when Younis Mahmoud led the nation to an unlikely Asian Cup victory, cementing himself as a legend of Iraqi football. 10 years on we ask the questions, was it Iraq's defensive players who were the real heroes? And is a defensive midfielder the missing piece to the puzzle when it comes to World Cup qualification?

Iraq have always been a team built on a solid defence; in the 2007 Asian Cup they conceded only two goals, an astonishing record. The team went on to concede just one goal at the Confederations Cup and go on to narrowly miss out on the World Cup qualification having conceded only 0.75 goals per game.

Iraq are now half way through the 2018 WCQ and of the 12 remaining teams, only Thailand have a worse defensive record. So what are Iraq missing that seemed to be there in the past, regardless of which manager was in charge?

Iraq's defenders now are arguably some of the strongest they have had. Ali Adnan plays for Udinese while Dhurgham Ismail and Ali Faez have moved to the Turkish Super League and Ahmed Ibrahim is in the years of his prime. However one position that has yet to be filled is that of a defensive midfielder.

Qusay Munir was an incredible player for Iraq and has inevitably been very difficult to replace; since his retirement some expected the promising Ibrahim Kamel to fill the void but he since fell out of favour, as did Saif Salman. Radhi Shenaishil has tried several players recently alongside the former wide man Saad Abdul-Amir in midfield - most recently the young Amjad Attwan - but they have all put in some very poor performances.



Ali Adnan is one of our many talented defenders, but Iraq still have defensive frailties



The poor quality of the domestic league has made it difficult to find the right man

The past year in world football has made it evident how important a strong anchor man is. Kante was massively influential in Leicester's shock Premier League title win. He has since moved to Chelsea who are now dominating England with a remarkable defensive record, whilst Leicester have collapsed.

Other examples are Real Madrid's defensive improvement with the introduction of Casemiro, and Crystal Palace going from challenging for a European place to battling relegation after the sale of Mile Jedinak. So why have Iraq struggled to find a good enough defensive midfielder in recent years?

If you look at Iraq's national team, it's mainly made up of players from Iraq's top clubs, many of which do not need to play with a defensive midfielder given the quality of opposition. At the same time players in this role for the lower sides are not at international level. This means there is both a lack of options and quality.

Given the circumstances, it seems apparent that Iraq need to look elsewhere; it might just be about time the national team looks to foreign leagues where there are a growing number of young players of Iraqi descent who have been trained by top coaches, such as Yaser Kasim who developed through the Tottenham academy.

Therefore, the answer to Iraq's defensive issues is likely not to be found within Iraq, but in fact within the new generation of players coming through Europe and Asia. Now more than ever it has become vital to increase the focus on scouting Iraqi players developing outside of its borders, in the hope of discovering the all-elusive anchor man.

Let us know what you think! Post a comment below, or head over to the forums ([click here](#)) and tell us which players you think can fill the void in defensive midfield in the future.



Radhi Shenaishil may need the help of his scouts to find a midfielder playing abroad

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